精霊使いの剣舞

精霊使いの休息

志瑞祐

Extra.6

Elementalists on Break

Part 1

There was a certain stone-paved street running across Ordesia's territory, commonly known as the "King's Road." Currently, a horse-drawn carriage decorated with a wolf's emblem was advancing slowly along this street.

"...By the way, are we there yet? That hot spring town."

"Almost there, it's just over that mountain—"

As the carriage clattered along, Claire pointed at the other side of the mountain afar.

"That's not really a distance you can call 'almost there.'"

Kamito narrowed his eyes and muttered. The sun was currently right overhead. It would definitely be night by the time they crossed the mountain to reach their destination.

"That cannot be helped, Kamito-san. Our destination, the Vornos hot spring, is a secret and remote spring where spirits gather. Spirits would not come if it were located too close to settlements."

"Mm-hmm, and if you bear with it all the way, it will feel more touching when you arrive at the hot spring, right?"

"Well, even if you say that..."

Confronted with replies from Rinslet and Ellis who were sitting opposite him, Kamito could only shrug.

—The whole affair started the previous day.

After winning against Velsaria in the selection tournament and securing their eligibility to compete in the Blade Dance, Team Scarlet's members were granted an exemption from all classes during the week prior to the main event according to school rules. This was to strengthen bonds and tacit

understanding within the team through a week of self-determined activities.

This was doubly true for Team Scarlet whose members had only gathered together as one team recently. Their unity was definitely far worse than that of Team Cernunnos, also from the Academy.

To overcome this weakness, Claire's solution as the leader was to visit the former Elstein territory to hold a training camp at a hot spring famous for its sacred properties.

...Hence, the group had set off from school yesterday morning. After spending one night at an inn by the main road, they had entered the former Elstein territory, known for its hot springs, and had spent several hours rocking in a carriage.

...No matter what, Kamito was truly tired of this mountain scenery the whole trip.

"By the way, we clearly would've arrived straight away if we borrowed a flying ship from the Fahrengart family..."

"How could the Ordesia military's flying ships be used for private use!?"

"Claire, are you dissatisfied with the carriage I prepared?"

"A carriage is fine and all, but it's a bit cramped with five people inside..."

Packed tightly inside the carriage body, Claire expressed her displeasure.

Carol the maid had stayed at the Academy whereas Est had turned to sword form, but even so, the interior of the carriage was still quite cramped. Added to that was the uneven road, causing the passengers to be pressed tightly against one another.

"Fufu, but isn't it nice to go on a journey like this once in a while?"

Boing.

"...H-Hey!?"

"...Sh-Shameless ruffian, see if I do not make onion rings out of you!"

"But I'm not an onion, hey!"

"Kyah, stop messing around inside the carriage!"

"Kamito, is it time to eat yet?"

"Almost, almost, just hang in there."

Kamito lightly tapped the hilt of the complaining Demon Slayer.

Part 2

Finally, when they actually reached the hot spring town at the bottom of the mountain, the sun had set and night had fallen completely.

A sloping path with stone-paved steps, roadside lighting with spirit crystals, the two sides of the entrance had statues of fire dragons spewing spectacular flames. Built at the top of the steps was a gigantic shrine with countless spirits flying back and forth in the air in the form of glowing orbs.

"So this is the famous hot spring town of Vornos..."

Getting off the carriage, Fianna murmured with interest.

"Is it your first time visiting a hot spring town, Fianna?"

"Yes. Although I have been to a hot spring truly in the depths of a mountain for a Divine Ritual Institute ceremony—"

"It is my first time too. This looks like quite an interesting place."

"In my case, I have been here many times before, but..."

"Yes, compared to its former prosperity, it's a lot more quiet..."

Claire murmured quietly.

Kamito looked around him. Indeed, for a famous hot spring town, there were a bit too many houses without lighting.

"Before that incident four years ago, the town was much more bustling, there

were many more people too—"

Four years ago, no fires could be lit at all in the Ordesia Empire because Claire's elder sister, Rubia Elstein, had turned traitor as the Calamity Queen.

This hot spring town, a mainstay of the Elstein family's, also suffered a devastating blow.

"However, the spirits have returned without problems—"

Rinslet gently placed her hand on the shoulder of the depressed Claire.

In the direction she pointed, a spirit with the appearance of a salamander was crawling on the ground.

"—Yeah, I guess you're right."

Although Claire's expression had turned melancholic for a moment, she returned to her usual cheerfulness immediately.

The five of them placed all of their luggage on Fenrir's back, passed through the gate at the foot of the mountain, then climbed up the stone steps towards the peak.

Although they looked like sheltered young ladies, all the girls here were elementalists who had gone through strict training at the Academy. Everyone ascended the mountain swiftly. The only exception was Fianna, who was now sitting on Fenrir's back due to her lack of stamina.

Even though night had fallen quite a while, there were streetlamps using magic for illumination so the road ahead was brightly lit. Thanks to the countless tiny flying fire spirits, even the darkness inside the forest had lighting.

"Wow. I can't believe so many spirits can be found outside of the Spirit Forest."

"Yes, this mountain is brimming with divine power liked by fire spirits."

In response to Kamito's impressed reaction, Est transmitted her thoughts while in sword form.

"...~Hey Scarlet, wait up!"

"Meow!"

Scarlet looked especially happy. Normally obedient, she was ignoring Claire in a rare display, running around on the steps.

"Seriously..."

"Well, Scarlet must be happy to return to her homeland after a long absence."

"My Fenrir is the same. Whenever he returns to the Laurenfrost home, he rolls around in the snow like a dog."

"...? Isn't he just a big dog?"

"...Excuse me, Your Highness! Please note that Fenrir is a proud dire wolf!"

"Woof!"

"M-My apologies, I have always regarded him as a dog..."

Looking down at the fluffy Fenrir, Fianna was quite shocked.

Part 3

When they reached the middle of the mountain, they could start to see a bit of light.

Kamito and company had left the main path leading to the peak, instead taking a side route towards steam drifting from the hot spring. Indeed, there were no illuminated buildings visible nearby.

After more walking up the slope...

"This place..."

Claire stopped.

"Eh—"

What came into view before their eyes was a magnificent mansion built by clearing out a patch of forest. This was originally the Elstein family's secondary residence, but unlike the gaudy trappings of ordinary nobles, it gave off a modest and sturdy impression instead.

"This place hasn't changed much either..."

Looking up at the mansion's entrance, Claire murmured quietly.

The center of the gate looked like some kind of crest had been taken off. Most likely, it was where the Elstein family's red lion emblem was hanging in the past.

Claire bit her lip hard and walked through the gate.

Out from the house came a slightly plump old lady to greet them.

"It has been a long time, Jira."

"Indeed, Milady Claire, it has been a long time."

"Who is she?"

Fianna asked.

"Jira used to be the head maid serving the Elstein family. After their lands and castles were confiscated, she became the manager of this hot spring inn that is open to the public."

"The Lord Duke looked after me very much in the past."

The old lady carefully bowed her head.

"You look to be in good health. I am so glad."

"Naturally, since the spirits that had left this forest have returned as you may know. This is all thanks to Lady Ren Ashbell's success in quelling the Fire Elemental Lord's wrath."

"...!"

"What's the matter, Kamito?"

Ellis looked at Kamito in puzzlement with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, nothing, it's nothing at all."

Kamito hastily waved the matter away.

"Milady Claire, you have grown so much..."

Overcome with emotion, the old lady embraced Claire.

"W-Wait, Jira..."

"Although her bust size has not changed at all—"

"...W-What did you say!?"

Gnashing her teeth, Claire snarled at Rinslet for making a snide remark on the side.

On the other hand, Jira widened her eyes in surprise.

"Oh my, to think that milady, who used to be so timid and meek..."

"Timid and meek?"

Kamito raised an eyebrow on reflex.

(...Did I hear that wrong? Just now, I think I heard something unbelievable...)

Part 4

Former head maid Jira led Kamito's group into the mansion.

The house was originally magnificent, but since all the valuable furniture had been confiscated by the Empire, there was a desolate feeling contrasting with the vast empty space.

Not only was there a lack of furniture but also personnel. Jira explained that the staff originally working here had quit one after another. Currently, the only ones remaining, including herself, were all formerly in the service of Duke Elstein's family.

"I have prepared the best room for you."

Jira walked up the stairs and opened the door to a room on the second floor.

"Wow..."

It was definitely a huge room. Although five luxurious beds were arranged side by side, the room did not feel cramped at all. Spirit crystals were set in the ceiling, illuminating the room brightly.

"But Milady, are you sure it is alright to room with a boy?"

"...K-K-Kamito is my contracted spirit, okay!"

Claire cried out, slightly flustered.

"...I understand. Fufu, milady sure has grown up."

The old lady smiled with apparent comprehension.

"From the window here, I can see the forest scenery—"

"Yes, the sight of flying spirits makes it almost like Astral Zero."

Having walked to the window side, Ellis and Rinslet exclaimed with excitement.

Suddenly, someone tugged Kamito's sleeve.

"Kamito, is dinner not ready yet?"

Kamito was confronted with those lucid violet eyes staring at him. By the time he noticed, Est had transformed from a sword to human form.

"I'm hungry too."

Claire nodded in agreement.

"Dinner is already ready for you all. We have obtained some excellent venison today."

...Half an hour later.

At the dining table, the chef's prided dishes were being brought out one after another.

There was salad made from wild vegetables gathered from the mountain, hot pumpkin soup, beans stir fried with butter, freshly baked walnut bread, river fish pie, and the main course was deer steak thoroughly seasoned with spices.

"Kamito, am I allowed to eat all of this?"

Despite her lack of facial expression, Est was asking with glimmering eyes.

"Yeah, you can eat as much as you like."

"Kamito, I am so happy♪"

Kamito also began to slice his deer steak. As soon as the knife sank into the steak, meat juices filled with the flavor of spices flowed out onto the plate.

"This is amazing!"

"Yes, it even rivals the quality of renowned restaurants in the imperial capital."

"Deer steak is a famous specialty of the Elstein territory."

Hearing praising comments from Kamito and Fianna, Claire proudly puffed out her chest.

"...Hmm, so Kamito likes this kind of seasoning. I'll take a note of that."

"May I take some of this meat for Carol who stayed behind at school?"

"Of course, no problem at all."

The chef took out a large piece of meat. Rinslet summoned Fenrir to instantly froze the meat, then had Fenrir swallow it into the dimension inside his stomach.

"Won't Fenrir eat the meat?"

"My Fenrir will not do anything as low as eating without permission!"

When Kamito asked without thinking, Rinslet replied somewhat angrily.

Once everyone had eaten their fill, Jira appeared again.

"Milady, I have come to take you and your friends to the hot spring. The water temperature is just right..."

Part 5

Kamito was taken to a place some slight distance from the inn, a hot spring in the forest.

Claire and the girls parted from him along the way to reach a hot spring for princess maidens, located higher up the mountain.

After removing his uniform in the changing area, Kamito ladled water to wash his body then dipped himself into the hot spring. The water temperature was a bit hot, causing some of his wounds from the battle against Velsaria to sting a little.

"...Phew, now this is a real hot spring. It feels like all my fatigue is being swept away."

Submerged in hot water up to his shoulders, Kamito relaxed and commented softly. There was a leyline of flowing divine power in the area of the Vornos volcano. For elementalists, this had an extremely potent restorative effect.

After relaxing his entire body, Kamito looked up and admired the view of the moon between the branches. Then he took off his leather glove to look at his left hand.

(...I've gotten the entry ticket to the Blade Dance now, but—)

Afer three years, the darkness spirit Restia had appeared before him again. Completely different from before, what on earth was she thinking?

At this very moment.

"Kamito..."

Amid the steam, he heard an adorable voice.

"...!?"

Kamito instantly looked up.

As the steam before his eyes scattered, snow-white skin came into view.

Illuminated by moonlight, a pale and naked body. Draped over her skin was glittering silver-white hair.

"E-Est!?"

Kamito reflexively leaned back.

Totally nude, Est was looking down at Kamito expressionlessly amid the steam.

(...W-Why is Est here!? Didn't she go to the princess maidens' hot spring with Claire and the others?)

Kamito felt confused. The water surface suddenly shook, scattering the steam.

Suddenly, two tiny hands covered Kamito's face.

"...!?"

"Kamito, do not look—"

"Huh?"

"Naked feet will be seen..."

While blocking Kamito's eyes, Est replied shyly.

"...R-Right. You definitely took off your kneesocks as is proper—"

"Yes, I have learned hot spring rules properly..."

Est twisted her waist slowly.

With his eyes covered, Kamito felt his heart pounding intensely. Although he

was used to seeing Est's body, he had yet to see her naked feet even once.

"...Th-This is the male bath. I remember there's a sacred hot spring higher up where spirits gather—"

Est slowly moved her hands away and gently leaned close to Kamito, pressing her snow-white skin tightly against him.

"To me, Kamito's side is where I feel the most at ease—"

"...H-Hey!?"

Just as Kamito raised his voice while his face turned bright red...

"Hmm, so this is the famous hot spring of Elstein territory?"

"Yes, it's been so long since I last visited..."

From behind the trees, the girls' voices were coming for some reason.

"...Hey, isn't this the male bath? Why are they coming here!?"

With the totally naked Est hugging him, Kamito stood up in panic... If he were caught looking like this, he would definitely get roasted into charcoal or turned into marinated salmon.

"Est, hurry and hide—"

"Did something happen?"

"It's an emergency. Hurry and turn into the Demon Slayer."

Despite some hesitation, Est soon nodded.

"Yes, I am Kamito's sword, your wish is my command—"

Dissolving into particles of light in the air, she turned into a one-handed sword.

Kamito grabbed the sword and swiftly dove into the water.

"—Assassination technique: Sleeping Lotus."

This was an underwater concealment skill that he had learned at the Instructional School. The instant before Claire and the girls arrived, Kamito's figure melded into the water.

Part 6

While Kamito was hiding himself, Claire and the girls entered the hot spring.

"The hot spring here also serves as excellent beauty care—"

"This hot spring is a sacred place, everyone, so please try to be quiet."

Fianna lectured the young ladies who were getting excited by the hot spring. Used to going through ritual purification at upper-class venues, they entered the water directly while covering their chests with their arms.

"Hmm~..."

Claire looked around and muttered.

"...B-Breasts can float on water..."

Fianna and Rinslet were sitting by her sides respectively and their breasts were half exposed above the water surface.

"Oh my, Claire has grown a little bit."

"Don't worry, Rubia-sama was very small in the beginning too."

"...R-Really?"

Comforted by the two girls, Claire cheered up slightly from her low spirits.

"B-Breasts are just a hindrance even if they become big..."

Sitting some distance away, Ellis cleared her throat and said.

"Hmm..."

"Just because her bust is the biggest—"

"Such arrogance cannot be tolerated."

The three girls stared intently at Ellis' chest.

"W-What on earth are you talking about... Umm?"

Just as Ellis was about to argue back, she suddenly stopped.

"...What is the matter?"

"J-Just now, I think I bumped into something hard..."

Ellis searched around the water with a frown.

"Something hard?"

"Rocks are hard, right? This is an open-air hot spring after all."

"...N-No, it was not hard like a rock. How should I describe it? It is something I have never touched before... Hwahhhhh!"

Suddenly, Ellis screamed and jumped.

"J-Just now, that hard thing moved..."

Then she looked tearfully at the water.

"There is something! Something is in the water!"

"Eh!?"

Claire reflexively stood up and stared at the water.

Silence. Several seconds later, tiny air bubbles appeared in the water.

"...!?"

The four girls braced themselves on reflex.

"...S-Scarlet!"

"Meow!"

Responding to Claire's summon, the flaming hellcat appeared out of thin air. Scarlet growled bravely and charged into the hot spring.

—Boom!

When Scarlet's claws touched the water surface, blazing flames erupted from them.

"...I-Is it taken care of?"

Ellis approached in trepidation and looked into the water.

Then—

"...Hmm, this is..."

What floated up to the surface was a branch.

"What, it was just a branch."

"U-Umm, b-but that sensation I touched earlier... Was I mistaken?"

Blushing bright red, Ellis tilted her head in puzzlement.

Part 7

"...Phew. I guess I made it out somehow."

Having discreetly escaped from the open-air bath, Kamito returned to the inn and breathed a long sigh of relief.

He originally wanted to hide in the water then exit but once Claire and the girls entered the hot spring, he could not get out. Just as he was running out of air, it was fortunate that Scarlet created a lot of steam. Seizing this chance, he successfully escaped at last.

It was also fortunate that Scarlet the flame spirit had been summoned. Were it Fenrir instead, he would have been frozen into a block of ice and captured.

"...That being said, why did the girls come to the male bath?"

Walking in the corridor, Kamito scratched his head.

"Oh my, you have finished enjoying the hot spring already?"

He encountered Jira who was putting blankets into the room.

"Y-Yeah, I can't stay too long in a bath..."

"Oh dear, and to think I prepared special service for you..."

Jira shrugged with a look of exasperation.

"Special service... Sigh, so that was what happened..."

Kamito massaged his temples.

...It looks like everything was plotted by her.

"Claire would've burned me to charcoal if I peeped."

"Fufu, someone as gentle as milady could not possibly do that."

While Kamito was grumbling with narrowed eyes, Jira waved her hands.

"Someone as gentle as milady..."

(...That's totally unlike the Claire I know.)

Kamito voiced his doubts internally.

"...Kamito-sama, Miss Claire has become able to smile frequently."

Suddenly...

Jira's expression turned serious and she said that.

"...Huh?"

Kamito replied in puzzlement without thinking.

"Ever since her elder sister Rubia-sama betrayed the Fire Elemental Lord and Duke and Lady Elstein were imprisoned, milady had stopped smiling—"

While covering the beds with blankets, Jira recounted.

"The last time I saw milady was when she stayed here before going to attend the previous Blade Dance. Milady had virtually forgotten how to smile, always bearing a cold and grim expression—"

"..."

Kamito listened quietly.

...He could not imagine this at all. As the Calamity Queen's younger sister, Claire had been subjected to hatred and fear from the Empire's citizens. Such a reality was far too heavy a burden for a maiden in the flower of youth.

(But now, Claire—)

"However, milady was able to smile as before during dinner earlier. I am truly overjoyed to see milady showing such happy expressions..."

"...I see."

Kamito thought back to when he first met Claire. Back then, she was like a solitary beast, always forcing herself, to the point of ignoring everything around her.

But having obtained comrades to fight by her side, Claire was gradually gaining confidence in her heart.

"I entrust Miss Claire to your care."

"...Yeah, I got it."

In response to Jira's deep bow, Kamito nodded vigorously.

Part 8

Another half an hour passed.

Claire and the girls returned to the room.

"Let's go, Ellis, take that!"

"...You are too naive. Eat this!"

"Let us all focus our attacks on Claire first, hah!"

"Hya!"

Poof. Poof poof poof.

Pillows kept flying back and forth in the room.

"...W-What the heck is this?"

Sitting on his bed, Kamito asked with half-open eyes.

"Kamito, this is the pillow-throwing ritual."

Est explained expressionlessly.

"You know of it, Est?"

"Yes, the pillow-throwing ritual is an ancient rite with equal standing as that mystery hotpot ritual. Originally, it was a ritual where bags of grain were tossed into the sky as offerings for spirits—"

"...I-I see now. That sounds more like a decent ritual at least."

Rituals came in myriad forms. Regardless of form, there existed spirits that would be pleased by weird rituals of this sort apart from blade dancing offered from elementalists.

"Even so, you don't have to do it in the room, right...?"

"No, Kamito, it is pointless to perform this ritual unless you do it at your lodgings when traveling."

"I see..."

Before Kamito's eyes, the pillows kept flying back and forth.

Oh well, since the pillows won't break things in the room, just let them, Kamito thought.

(...Well, it does resemble those exercises for training reflexes.)

Indeed, one of the exercises at the Instructional School was a similar event. However, instead of pillows, they threw daggers and hand-axes.

"W-Wait, I am not good at this type of... Hmmm!"

Fianna was hit directly in the face by a pillow.

"Now you have done it! Come, Georgio... Hbbb!"

Struck on the side of her head by a flying pillow, Fianna was knocked off her

bed.

"Too careless, Fianna."

Claire gloated and puffed out her tiny chest.

"...H-Hey, this is the Empire's princess here, you know?"

...Normally speaking, even being sentenced to death for insolence was nothing unusual.

"Pillow-throwing is a serious competition. Even if Her Highness participates, we cannot hold back."

"Indeed, Kamito. You should join in too—"

"Take that!"

Claire, Ellis and Rinslet threw pillows at Kamito simultaneously.

"...What the!?"

Kamito jumped on reflex and used one hand to strike down the incoming pillows.

"W-Well done..."

Seeing the three girls in awe, Kamito shrugged lightly.

"...Fine, I'll serve as an opponent for all of you."

"Hmph, you won't be talking so relaxed after this. Ellis, Rinslet, we're forming an alliance!"

"Very well."

"Hmm, it cannot be helped!"

"Naive—"

Kamito dodged the incoming pillows in the nick of time.

Next—

"Kamito, huammm...!"

"...Est!?"

Hearing a scream behind him, Kamito turned around with a bad feeling. In that instant...

"Kamito, you're wide open!"

Poof, poof poof poof.

The pillows thrown by the girls all hit Kamito in the face one after another.

Part 9

It was after midnight. Exhausted from pillow-throwing, Claire and the girls collapsed on their beds one after another, then fell asleep, wrapped in their blankets.

Still awake, Kamito rested Est, who had turned back into a sword, against the wall, then lay down in his pajamas on the far bed.

(...It's nice to play like this once in a while.)

His body was gradually cooling down from its elevated temperature. The hot spring's effects were truly no lie. His entire body felt much more relaxed now.

(...In my current state, am I able to use that mystic technique?)

Kamito extended his left hand at the ceiling and made a fist lightly.

—Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance. Three years ago, the continent's strongest elementalist had taught him this mystic technique of the sword.

During the past three years when he had wandered the continent in search of Restia, his sword skills had deteriorated severely.

Despite what bits he had recalled during the battles against Jio Inzagi and Velsaria, he was still far reaching Ren Ashbell's peak form. Even so, he must seize victory in the Blade Dance tournament against the gathering of

powerhouses from every nation.

Furthermore, there was another "Ren Ashbell" competing in the Blade Dance.

(...Am I able to defeat her?)

He slowly put down his extended left hand.

—At that moment, he heard the tiny sound of blanket friction in the room.

"...?"

Kamito raised an eyebrow in doubt and stared into the darkness.

In her pajamas, Claire had quietly gotten up from bed. Taking care not to make any noise, she discreetly opened the door and exited the room.

(...Claire?)

Kamito wondered if he should make a sound. From the faint moonlight streaming through the window, he had seen the side of her face and her pensive expression.

Kamito quietly got up and followed Claire out of the room.

Claire went up the steps one by one, arriving at a balcony on the third floor. With her hands resting on the railing in the balcony, she looked down at the town spread out at the foot of the mountain.

Perhaps it was his imagination, but her figure seemed to be trembling slightly.

"Can't sleep?"

"...Kamito?"

Claire turned around with eyes widened with surprise.

Her ruby-like eyes seemed slightly moist.

"...Well, for some reason... I was also thinking of getting a bit of a night breeze here."

While scratching his head, Kamito also started to look out at the scenery at the foot of the mountain.

"What a great view."

"Yeah..."

Claire nodded.

Her gorgeous red hair fluttered in the night breeze.

Kamito did not say anything—

Claire slowly lifted her hand and pointed at the plain in the distance.

"Over there lies what used to be land under the Elstein family's direct jurisdiction."

"Your hometown, Claire?"

"...Yes, but now, there is not even a trace left. Due to the Fire Elemental Lord's wrath, all of it was incinerated completely."

Claire put down her hand and turned towards Kamito.

"I got up because I wanted to come here and see this view of my homeland before the Blade Dance. One day, I will make it possible for my father and mother... as well as my sister to return there. This is my true *wish*."

"..."

...Those eyes, with flames residing in them, looked straight at Kamito. Like flickering flames, there was weakness and fragility, not just strength, in them.

However, Kamito was attracted precisely by this fragility, thus deciding to wield his sword for her sake.

Her flames had rescued Kamito from despair after his loss of Restia.

"Kamito, lend me your strength—"

"Yeah."

Kamito placed his hand on Claire's head.

"...!"

"Of course I will. After all, I'm your contracted spirit—"